Property of Wilma Ely
Sierra Historic Sites Assoc.
1734 Pierce Dr.
Oakhurst, CA 93644
Library

THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

Volume 5 - Number 4 October, 1965

JAMES D. SAVAGE
by
JANE ELLEN CURRY

Born in New York, probably in 1817, James Savage and his family early became a part of the continual westward migration. The family of six children including James settled with their parents, Peter and Doritha Shawnce Savage, in Illinois in 1822.

James married and had a daughter while living in Peru, Illinois. In 1846 he and his wife and daughter joined an emigrant party for the trip to California. Both his wife and child failed to survive the hardships of the journey.

Reaching Sutter's Fort in October of 1846, Savage volunteered for Freemont's California Battalion with which he served until April or May of the following year. He was court-martialed along with some others in December 1846 but was not dismissed from the service.

Following his being mustered out of the battalion, Savage worked for John Sutter at his fort. Sutter recorded in his diary various tasks Savage undertook between May and September of 1847, one of which was aiding Marshall in constructing the mill where gold was discovered in January 1848.

Between September 1847 and the early summer of 1848 is a period during which James Savage may have been at Sutter's Fort or elsewhere, perhaps among the Indians. He appears as a miner and Indian trader in mid-1848 at Woods Diggings on a branch of the Tuolumne River. He also carried on some trading activities in Jamestown having found the Indians would exchange their gold for goods of various kinds.

It isn't possible to say accurately when he was carrying on his trading in Jamestown but in 1849 he moved into the Big Oak Flat area and continued his mining and trading activities. As later Americans were to discover, there were fortunes to be made in supplying the miners; Savage utilized the same principle in supplying the Indians and it is apparent that he kept on the move southward with his trading posts in order to stay away from the largest influx of white gold seekers. His advantage in trading with the Indians no doubt resulted to some extent from their lack of knowledge of values and limited desires.

Savage had learned to converse with the Indians in their own language by 1849 and had taken possibly five Indian women as his wives. His trading activities were then concentrated on the Merced River at Horseshoe Bend and further east at the junction of the South Fork and the main stream. Trouble between a white miner and an Indian at Big Oak Flats had caused the latest southward move.

After Savage established his trading post at the mouth of the South Fork of the Merced, he began to have his first difficulties with the Indians. The Yosemite Indians attacked his trading post there causing him to move his store to a site near Mariposa and Agua Fria. Apparently he was not on friendly terms with any of the Yosemites.

As well as his post on Mariposa Creek, Savage established one on the Fresno River to the south about 4 miles from Coarse Gold's present site and carried on a flourishing trade at both places in 1850 with whites as well as Indians. Savage was evidently quite able to adapt himself and his business methods

to a rapidly changing market.

Because friendly Indians told him further Indian troubles could be expected, Savage took one of the important Chowchilla chieftains, Jose Juarez, for a trip to San Francisco hoping to impress the chief with the number of whites and the futility of Indian uprisings. No doubt Savage intended to secure supplies and possibly deposit some of his gold for safekeeping. A great amount of this gold was spent in "doing the town" and celebrating California's entrance into the Union.

While in San Francisco Jose Juarez and Savage had some sort of quarrel; thus when Savage and his party returned to Mariposa County and Savage talked earnestly with a group of leading Indians about the strength of the whites, Jose refused to corroborate his statements.

This situation caused Savage to fear more Indian trouble and he went from his Fresno store where he had talked with the Indians to his Mariposa post. While there he heard his Fresno post had been attacked and, finding few people willing to take seriously his warnings of a general uprising, he went on to Horseshoe Bend to seek aid there. After he left Mariposa Creek that store was also attacked. In each case three attendants were killed by the Indians.

Colonel Adam Johnston, Federal Indian agent for the San Joaquin Valley was then in the Mariposa area and, after investigating the Fresno River attack, called for volunteers to defend the area and started for San Jose to see the governor. A group of seventy four assembled and led by the sheriff, with Savage as a guide, they fought two battles in January of 1851. One of the chiefs was killed in the second battle which seemed to turn the tide in favor of the whites.

Governor McDougal, having received several communications about the seriousness of the situation, authorized the raising of what was to be called the Mariposa Battalion of about 200 men. James Savage became its Major in command of three companies. Dr. Lafayette Bunnell who wrote careful accounts of the battalion's activities was unofficially attached as surgeon.

During the latter part of February 1851 the battalion waited impatiently while three U. S. Indian commissioners signed treaties with various tribes to the north and west of Mariposa Creek. Savage serving as an interpreter assisted the commissioners in securing the treaties with some of the tribes. Early in March, when it appeared the Indians in the high mountains would not come of their own accord to sign a treaty, the governor sent orders allowing the battalion to proceed to find the rebellious Indians without further delay. Major Savage's group composed of two companies proceeded toward Yosemite Valley, going first to the Wawona area from Mariposa Creek and then north into the valley along a route similar to the one now followed by the road from the South entrance to Yosemite National Park. On the way they were met by Chief Tenaya of the Yosemites and he promised his people would come in. When they didn't appear the next day, Savage and part of his men proceeded on toward Yosemite Valley. Seventy two Yosemites met them and agreed to proceed on to Wawona where some of the force remained with another group of Indians. Savage felt sure there must be more Yosemites and so he and part of his two companies, including Dr. Bunnell, proceeded on to the valley's edge somewhere west of Bridal Veil Falls. This day was March 25, 1851. James Savage is remembered because his force entered the valley, and explored it looking for the elusive Indians. Dr. Bunnell helped to publicize the event.

The battalion and its captive Indians returned to the camp of the U. S. commissioners on April 1 on the Fresno River. Here Savage remained for three months assisting with the treaty-making process. Reservations were set aside for the Indians on the Fresno and Kings Rivers. Incidentally, Tenaya and most of the Yosemites escaped and there were further expeditions after them in which Savage did not participate. The battalion was mustered out in July 1851.

JAMES D. SAVAGE (Continued)

Re-embarking on his trading career Savage re-opened his Mariposa Creek post, re-established his Fresno River post several miles farther down stream, and secured a permit to trade with the Indians on the Fresno reservation at a third post called Fort Bishop.

It was in the fall of 1851 that another contemporary account of him originates. Sam Ward described Savage after meeting him in October, 1851, in these words, "I observed that his face was clean-shaved and his complexion sallow despite exposure in the open air..." To those who discussed with Ward the possibility that Savage might have been partly Indian himself, Ward wrote that this was "an absurdity flatly contradicted by his hair, which was as fair as the golden locks of Achilles." Savage caused great excitement among the Indians present, some of whom conversed with him in their own language.

Savage headed a commission to set up a government for the newly organized Tulare County in 1852, and helped to elect as judge the man who later shot him. This judge, Major Walter Harvey, must have been sympathetic towards the American settlers who felt that the Indian commissioners had given too much good land to the tribes put on the Fresno and Kings River reservations. Some of those in the state legislature shared this view. Thus when trouble developed on the Kings between American "squatters" and reservation Indians Major Harvey was involved in the death of several Indians at the hands of a group of Americans under Harvey's leadership.

In August of 1852 Major Savage journeyed to the Kings River reservation to attend a gathering of Indians and on his way made a point of seeking out Harvey at Campbell's Ferry. Savage understood Harvey had said he was no gentleman. An argument followed and when Savage's pistol fell to the floor during the scuffle Harvey shot and killed Savage.

Dr. Lewis Leach, one of Savage's partners, three years later had Savage's remains brought to the present site and marked by a granite shaft. This monument is located sixteen miles northeast of Madera on the Fresno River near the place where the second Fresno River store had been.

Some questions remain unanswered. No records have yet been found showing any fortune or wealth acquired in Savage's allegedly prosperous trading posts. No information is available now on what happened during the winter of 1847-8 when he must have begun his Indian mining-trading ventures. Exactly what happened between Savage and Harvey is not very clear either.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collins, Carvel, Sam Ward in the Gold Rush, Stanford University Press, 1949.

Cossley-Batt, Jill L., The Last of the California Rangers, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1928.

Kester, Frank "Along the Trail," Tulare County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 8, June, 1951.

Mitchell, Annie R., Jim Savage and The Tulareno Indians, Western Lore Press, 1957.

Mitchell, Annie R., King of the Tulares and Other Tales from the San Joaquin Valley, 1772-1852, Visalia, Visalia Times-Delta Press, 1941.

Russell, Carl Parker, One Hundred Years in Yosemite, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1947.

Wood, Raymund F., California's Agua Fria, Fresno, Academy Library Guild, 1954.

* * * *



The Savage Monument As We See It Today

THE SAVAGE MONUMENT TODAY

On Friday, September 3rd, the one acre ground on which the monument stands was sold for delinquent taxes. The Board of Directors of the Madera County Historical Society had previously appointed Mildred Eaves, Vice President and Chairman of Landmarks, and Guy Crow, Charter President, to be present at the sale and they were authorized to bid beyond the $20.00 delinquent taxes if there was competition. There was competition and it was necessary to pay $45.00. The Madera County Historical Society now possesses the deed to this property.

The Society is presently considering possible sites for the monument and the remains of Major Savage. It is generally known that a large dam and reservoir is to be located on the Fresno River in the vicinity of the present location of the monument, which will be under water when the construction is completed.

Four possible sites have been offered so far.

Mildred Eaves, Landmarks Chairman, has corresponded with U. S. Army Engineer District in Sacramento and we have received definite instructions as to the correct procedure. They suggest three possible locations. Another site has been offered by a private party.

The Society will hear more about this at the December meeting and at the Annual Meeting in January.

The Society recommends that all members express their opinions relative to the relocation of the monument, either write in or, better yet, attend the meetings.

HOW CAN WE SEE THIS MONUMENT TODAY?

Procure key from Arnold Agency, 304 So. F St., Madera. Leave Madera on River Road No. 400, continuing to Road 407. Take lefthand road at this fork, continue until you cross the Hensley Bridge, then first road on right, which leads to the Johnny Laurang Ranch, take southeast road. There are five gates, the second gate is locked.

OLD ADOBE OR CHINA STORE

Many think this old adobe building which stands about 100 feet from the Savage Monument was the store operated by James Savage. This supposition, however, is not true. The "Adobe" was constructed about 1870 by a man named William Lennibecker.

The old "Adobe" is fairly well preserved considering time, weather and livestock.



ARE YOU STILL INTERESTED? HERE'S SOME MORE -

(We give a special thanks to the Tulare County Historical Society's Bulletin No. 8, June, 1951, by Frank Kester)

Members of the Tulare County Historical Society last Sunday made a pilgrimage to the grave of Major James D. Savage. Tulare County owes its governmental organization in 1852 to Savage who is also credited with being the discoverer of the Yosemite valley just 100 years ago. He was murdered on Kings River shortly after the county was organized as he was serving as first commissioner of elections.

At the time he was buried nearby. A few years later, Dr. Lewis Leach, who had been his partner in various trading ventures in

California, had the body removed and reburied at the site of one of their trading posts on the Fresno river about 18 miles from the present city of Madera, not far from Coarsegold. Dr. Leach, at his own expense, had a granite shaft shipped out from Connecticut by windjammer around the Horn and raised above Savage's resting place.

The trip of the Tulareans Sunday proved the fact that the adobe was not build until twenty years after Savage's death. Authority for the change of record is W. D. "Bill" Hensley, (now deceased) 74 years of age, who was born near the old adobe and was raised in the immediate vicinity.

The present adobe, according to Hensley, who is active and possessor of a keen mind, was constructed by a man of the name of William Lennibecker about 1870. The camp at that time was a thriving place with several hundred Chinamen mining the bars of the immediate vicinity. Chinese miners always followed white miners at the early day camps. Lennibecker hired three Chinese to operate the store. For this reason the camp name was changed from Savage's to China Store.

Hensley pointed out the location of Savage's store about one hundred feet from the adobe. He also described the location of other places in the camp, including the drug store of Dr. Leach, the hospital, as well as the place where he himself had been born across the stream from the old adobe.

In time, as the placers were worked out, the Chinese miners and others drifted away and the buildings, with the exception of the adobe, were all destroyed by man and weather.

The adobe and shaft are located on a one acre piece of property which belongs to the Native Sons of the Golden West. However, because of the difficulty of reaching the site, five stock gates must be opened and closed, and the road not of the best, there are but few visitors at present and the grass and weeds have grown over the area.

The shaft and adobe are on a shoulder from which can be obtained a fine view of the back country and the flats of the Fresno river below which were so thoroughly mined by the Chinese from 75 to 100 years ago. It is hoped by those making the journey, Sunday, that the state, Madera county, or the Native Sons, can be induced to secure about five more acres leading down to the river where a lovely picnic and camping site could be established. Maderans are planning improvements to the road and placing of cattle guards at the numerous gates so as to make the site easier of access.

At the rear of the adobe is an excavation in the hill site that at first glance one might take to have been a cellar or store room. That excavation, though, according to Hensley, was a spot selected by the three Chinese store keepers to collect extra money for themselves.

Many of the Oriental miners were addicted to the use of opium. The trio of Celestial store keepers excavated the back slope, rigged up a small building with bunks inside and did a land office business in operating an opium den there.

Today all signs of men's lust for gold and depravity have been wiped away by the erasing hand of Mother Nature. The opium den is merely a hole in the bank. The placers have been swept out of existence by the floods of the Fresno river in the years that have gone.

Silky cotton bearing cottonwoods line the stream. Willows droop their trailing limbs in the chuckling waters, and the stream laughs in merry glee as it flows toward the San Joaquin valley. The Indians have faded from the hillsides and canyons and the miners have departed from the bars. But the glorious Mariposa lilies, lupines, golden mimulus, and poppies, grow in wild abandon everywhere. Instead of hoarse shouts of the miners, today are heard the liquid trills of the meadow lark, the sharp sweet notes of the sulphur bellied fly catchers, or the

Wilma Ely
49734 Pierce Dr.
Oakhurst, CA 93644

hammering of the California woodpeckers, the well loved El Carpintero of the Mexican miners. It is again a peaceful land waiting patiently to bring restored health and joy to tired business folks of a modern world, a place well worthy of becoming a well patronized shrine.

The meeting Sunday was one of several planned by various historical groups of California to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Yosemite and to honor those who were responsible for that event. Nearly 100 persons from Tulare and Madera county were present to hear eulogies of Savage, who discovered the valley, and to listen to the tales of the early days. Guy Crow, of the Madera Chamber of Commerce, presided. Walter Chandler, District Attorney of Madera county, Harold Schutt, president of the Tulare county historical society, Judge Stanley Murray, Wesley Smith, Miss Blanche Galloway, Madera librarian, Ralph Anderson of the National Park Service from the Yosemite, and Frank Kester of the Tulare society spoke briefly on Savage.

* * * *

BILL HENSLEY

Since the meeting at Savage Monument we have received additional interesting information from Mr. William D. Hensley of Madera, Mr. Hensley, who is seventy-four, was born very near the monument and has lived a large share of his life almost within sight of it. His grandfather left Missouri in 1853, coming direct to California and settled on the Fresno River across from the Savage Monument in 1862. Mr. Hensley recalls that the children enjoyed going the two miles from home to the store to buy "wow tong", a Chinese candy sold in yellow bars. William Lennibecker, who built the adobe store building about 1872 was a partner of Mr. Hensley's father in some cattle. Lennibecker lost his mind and the store was operated by Chinese. It was known as the Upper China Store as there was another, the Lower China Store, about a mile downstream on the other side of the river, the foundation of which still exists. Ah Sun, the owner of the Lower store, purchased the other and consolidated operations at the Savage Monument. Floods washed out much of the Chinese mining equipment on the river and the store was closed in 1894. Mr. Hensley remembers that an old building, said to be a part of the Savage trading post still stood some one hundred feet in front of the adobe when the store was closed in 1894.

Mr. Hensley received much of his information about the early history of this area from Reuben Thornton Chandler, who was called "Captain" and had served with Major Savage. (The muster roll of Company B, Mariposa Battalion, lists Chandler as First Lieutenant under Captain Bowling. It was this company that made the careful exploration of Yosemite Valley after the original discovery in March 1851.) Mr. Hensley says that Chandler is buried not more than two miles from the Savage Monument.

* * * *

99TH ANNIVERSARY OF MASSACRE AT SAVAGE'S TRADING POST CITED

Madera Daily News Tribune
December 21, 1949

Present Day Friant Was The Scene!

FRIANT--Tuesday marked the 99th anniversary of one of the great tragedies of early California history. It was on Dec. 20, 1850, that the massacre occurred at Major James D. Savage's trading post on the San Joaquin river near present-day Friant. All persons living near and at the post were killed, and the store was looted and burned by marauding Indians under Jose Juarez, chief of the Chowchillas.

Major Savage was not at the post at the time. He had gone up the San Joaquin into the mountains looking for his wives. The Indians, who liked and respected Savage,

waited till he was gone, then raided the post.

Major Savage was one of the more colorful personalities of early California history. He came across the plains and into the San Joaquin valley by immigrant train in 1846, and immediately enlisted under John C. Fremont to fight in the Mexican war. When California was liberated, he turned to trading and mining. He built a string of trading posts along the Sacramento, the Fresno, and the San Joaquin rivers, and along Mariposa creek. He had between 200 and 300 Indians working his gold mines.

Savage was one of the great friends of the Indians. However, ill treatment meted out by others, caused unrest and touched off a wave of pillaging and murder. Savage organized the Mariposa battalion to cope with it. After the massacre at the Fresno Crossing near Friant, troops were sent to the upper San Joaquin Valley, and Fort Miller was established in 1851. The troops and about 1500 Indians held a peace parley in December of the same year, and the Indians were settled peaceably on three large reservations in the valley.

The Tule River reservation encroached on the property of a Walter Harvey. Harvey began a systematic persecution of the Indians on what he considered his land, beating, killing and abusing them. Major Savage issued a statement and roundly condemned the man in the newspapers. Harvey sent a message to Savage and dared him to come to his trading post on the Tule river. Savage came, and a fierce altercation took place during which Savage knocked Harvey down, then proceeded to stalk off. Harvey shot him in the back.

Thus ended the career of Major Savage, one of California's memorable pioneers. Harvey was never brought to trial; he lived out his life in bitterness, shunned and decried by everyone for the cowardly shooting of Major Savage.

* * * *

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We have gathered various articles from newspapers, bulletins and our main feature, plus two pictures that our readers might become more familiar with one of our oldest landmarks. We have also added a bibliography, compiled by Jane Ellen Curry, if you desire to read more.

Perhaps you will not agree with some of the information presented on these pages. Do not hesitate to inform us. All the information given is taken directly from published material.

* * * *

THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

Contributor - Jane Ellen Curry,
Dean of Girls, Madera Union High School

Managing Editors - Madera County Historical Society Board of Directors

THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by the Madera County Historical Society, P. O. Box 478, Madera, California, 93637. Subscription, 50¢ per copy, $2.00 per year, is included in membership in the Society. Please credit "The Madera County Historian" when reproducing any part.